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ABSTRACT

"Rhetoric Review" ("RR") was founded in 1982 as an umbrella journal in composition studies with rhetoric, the most inclusive discipline in the humanities, at its center. Being editor of such a journal requires a working knowledge of production, layout, and design, besides handling other routine duties like correspondence and reading manuscripts. The editor also sets and maintains the journal's tone, being careful not to let his or her personal voice become prominent. "RR" owes much of its success to its editorial board and referees--each article goes through at least five readers before it is published, and each author receives a personal letter from the editor if his or her manuscript is accepted or rejected. As a reader's rather than an editor's publication, "RR" does not encourage articles that are (1) encyclopedia rewrites, (2) superficial approaches to a subject, (3) obvious topics, (4) answering questions no one is asking, (5) banal in "voice," and (6) research reports rather than articles based on research. Although "RR" has avoided being formulaic, it seems to reflect the tone of composition studies more than any other composition journal, probably because each issue includes a variety of articles with various voices, while retaining the language of the humanities. Each issue of a journal like "RR" is an unanticipated community where writers meet one another and their readers. (NKA)

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Scholarly Editing: Creating and Shaping Communities

Composition Studies more than any other discipline was formed and is largely known by the professional journals in which our work appears. The new journals of the 70s and 80s reflected the growing specialization in composition studies, many of them launched to give authority to those whose work didn't fit into the intellectual authority of established journals. My motives were different when in 1982 with no seed grant or funding--but with considerable ignorance--I launched Rhetoric Review. I believed we in rhetoric and composition needed a journal that reflected our diversity, a truly generalist journal, one that would not add to our increasing fragmentation. The purpose behind RR was that it be an umbrella journal with rhetoric, the most inclusive discipline in the humanities, at its center. What, then, are some perspectives on editing and scholarship and how does Rhetoric Review, probably the most independent journal in Composition Studies, fit in?

Being the editor of an independent journal requires a marriage of disparate fields; the editor often is the entire "staff" and personally performs all the tasks that in journals supported by institutions or organizations are usually divided among several staff members. Copy editing,

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the mechanical marking of the manuscript so that it is in literal and literary form to be typeset or printed from galley proof, is actually less time consuming than all that goes into the complete process, although some confuse copy editing with the whole of the editorial process. RR has an associate editor with an attentive eye and a retentive memory who copy edits the majority of manuscripts, making the job of formatting onto disks and proofing galleys less costly and time consuming. However, the editor of an independent journal like Rhetoric Review does have to have working knowledge of manufacturing, postal regulations, copyright, typeface and typesetting hardware, computer formatting programs, cover stock, binding, advertising, design and layout, promotions and subscriptions, computerized mailing lists. Most of this is hands-on work and must be added to the editor's other responsibilities: handling routine--and never-ending--correspondence, carrying a full teaching load, doing committee work, keeping up with what other editors are doing, and trying to find time for individual scholarly research and writing projects. To launch and edit an independent journal, then, one must possess both naivete and the neurotic trait of compulsiveness--and the willingness to read manuscripts nights and weekends.

Besides being smothered under paperwork, the editor sets and maintains the journal's tone. All journals tend to be either a reader's journal or an editor's journal. While

some of our composition journals have not been perceived as separate from their editors, RR has from the beginning tried to meet readers' interests fairly exactly rather than its editor's. Individualized approaches can distinguish and enliven a medium, but the danger here is if the journal becomes too much the editor's voice, the result often is a publication that is "processed" with assembly-line uniformity. Every issue as well as every article begins to look the same, and readers may have trouble remembering what they have or have not read. Eventually, they may no longer care.

Of all responsibilities, what do I like least about my job as editor? Subscription renewals are the biggest headache because too many subscribers wait until after an issue has been printed to send in their renewals; by that time, of course, their names have been removed from the current mailing list. An independent journal that depends upon subscribers for its survival needs to know two or three months ahead of issue date how many subscribers it has to ensure printing neither too many nor too few issues, to take advantage of bulk mail rates, to cut down on paperwork such as renewal reminders, and to minimize the constant deletion and addition of names to the master Rolodex and computerized mailing list. When large numbers of our subscribers don't respond in a reasonable time to our renewal notices, instead waiting until the issue comes out, we have to guess on printing orders, perhaps ending up with an embarrassing low

supply of back issues or a costly over supply. And when we have to mail out issues individually rather than at bulk mail, the cost per piece rises from 14 cents to a staggering $1.10.

An editor, then, has varying degrees of responsibility in managing and producing a scholarly journal. But apart from these responsibilities, I argue that editing is indeed one kind of scholarly activity. Some editors are quite powerful in controlling a particular area, but all good editors of scholarly publications must know the literature of the discipline as comprehensively or perhaps better than others. A good editor must read the other journals to see what questions are being asked. A good editor must touch the discipline at all pulse points and discover, or recognize, needs still unmet. But many administrators and deans perceive the editor involved in one task only, that of copy editing.

Being perceptive of its readership is the hallmark of a professional and scholarly journal. Because the editor of an independent journal is actively involved at the very heart of the publication, the editor knows the publication as no one else can; the editor knows its readers and attempts to meet their needs. An editor of such a journal must somehow know what its readers <u>will</u> like or <u>will</u> need--slightly ahead of them. Some of this "knowing" may be instinctual; but in the case of <u>Rhetoric Review</u>, its editorial board and referees probably have more to do with

carrying out our purpose than any editorial instinct I may have. For Rhetoric Review is a strictly refereed journal, its editorial board and its referees a working body of readers. The decision to make RR a refereed journal came out of concern that neither of our NCTE journals at that time was truly refereed. Literary journals traditionally have been refereed, and the fact that few, if any, composition journals were refereed caused problems in tenure and promotion decisions, especially in traditional English departments. The decisions of the current editors of CE and CCC to depend on peer review will, I believe, strengthen their authority even more.

RR's own peer review procedure begins after a personal acknowledgement of each submittal. First I read each manuscript; then I pass most on the submittals to the associate editor. The manuscripts that get through this initial screening I then send, with authors' names removed, to two of our referees, accompanied by an evaluation form and a reminder of RR's three-week referee response time. If both reviews of a manuscript here are favorable, or if the two evaluations completely differ, the manuscript then goes to one or more members of the editorial board. So each article goes through at least five readers before it is published in Rhetoric Review. The exceptions to this procedure are our essay reviews, which are commissioned, the majority of the Repartee pieces, and the poems. We have printed three textbook reviews that were not by invitation.

However, the reviews we print now are written only by invitation, so there will be no questions of reviewers' motives.

Even with this tiered system, I can nearly always respond to authors within two months, making RR perhaps the first refereed composition journal with such a fast response time. I might add that when we reject a manuscript, I personally write the author, not only giving reasons for the rejection but also, when I can, giving suggestions for revision. These letters can arise from pretty tricky rhetorical situations because often I have to take reviewers' comments written for the editor and revise them so that they will encourage rather than discourage the writer. Of course, I love to write acceptance letters; they're easy. Our acceptance rate is about 7-10 percent with an average of fifteen manuscripts a month. With only the two issues a year, our space is quite limited, even though each issue is about 125 pages.

RR began blind refereeing two years ago to avoid criticism of the peer review system that it is biased in favor of (1) established scholars and scholars at prestigious institutions; (2) scholars pursuing certain fashionable types of research, and (3) scholars who are male. Perhaps these criticisms are more justified in traditional literary studies than in rhetoric and composition. About the criticism that most published authors are male: unlike literary studies, Composition

Studies is made up of more women than men. Yet the irony is, just as in literary journals, the majority of published articles are by male authors. But when our journals, and this has been our experience with Rhetoric Review, receive more submissions from male authors, then the majority of published articles will be by male authors. One heartily voiced criticism centers on a paradox: The referees who are arbiters of rigor, quality, and innovation in articles submitted for publication do not apply to their own work the standards they use in judging the work of others.

A descriptive study of peer review by the American Council of Learned Societies' Survey of Scholars discussed these criticisms, reporting that even though two-thirds of those surveyed thought there was some bias in the system, still none thought it should be replaced. Three central conclusions emerged from the survey: (1) Peer review, despite its imperfections, does lead to better decisions on what to publish and to an improvement in the quality of a high proportion of manuscripts--and it is worth the effort; (2) nevertheless, it falls far short of its potential, and steps need to be taken to improve it; and (3) much more needs to be known about how the system is working in practice. The survey I mention here did not, as far as I'm able to determine, include rhetoric and composition scholars. I wonder if a survey in our discipline would show less suspicion of bias, but until someone undertakes such a study, we won't know for sure.

What kind of articles, then, do we look for? Because RR is a reader's rather than an editor's or an organization's publication, I can best tell you what readers don't like because the list is short.

1. The encyclopedia rewrite or a summary of secondary sources. Readers do not want literature surveys but do want a continuing argument about meanings.
2. The once-over-lightly job that reveals a superficial approach to the subject rather than a real dig for interesting facts.
3. The obvious subject that is always thought of first.
4. The article that answers questions no one is or will be asking.
5. A voice that is not distinctive, alert, lively, that is not an effective instrument of communciation.
6. Research reports rather than articles based on research. A research report differs from an article based on research in several ways. First, the content is different in that the conventional research report has formal elements and rigid structure. Such a report is recognizeably partitioned into a description of the problem to be solved or a hypothesis, a discussion or narration of the methodology, and a results or implications section. An article based on research

presents some theory or classroom application. The form is less rigid, and rhetorical relationships of subject, writer, and reader achieve some balance. RR readers don't like protocol studies or quantitative analyses; they do not like articles that use the language of the social sciences; they do want the language of the humanities in the journal.

I'd like now to talk about some larger issues of editing and scholarship in composition, beginning with our distinctive tone. Janice Lauer talks about our dappled discipline, about how the tone of Composition Studies is different from other disciplines in the arts and sciences:

> From the beginning the field of composition studies has been permeated with a sense of community. New work attempts to build on previous studies rather than to ridicule them or demolish them. Unlike the slaughter in some fields in which proponents of one persuasion struggle in mortal combat with those of another and unlike the more covert warfare in other fields in which newcomers carve out niches for themselves by enlarging loopholes in previous work, composition scholars huddle together in the face of tidal waves of problems whose solutions demand collaboration. Another resonance of this tone is a healthy sense of humor and honesty, arising from the irony that one day a composition scholar can

> reign as a visiting authority and the next day return to a humble role of local pariah. ("Composition Studies: Dappled Discipline," RR 3 [1984]: 20-29)

I believe Rhetoric Review reflects the tone of composition studies perhaps more than any other composition journal. What I've tried to keep within the pages of RR is a sense of who we are, and who we are has disappeared from the pages of too many journals. Rhetoric Review has, I think, avoided becoming formulaic; indeed, the journal is in part characterized by its unpredictability. In each issue I try to include a variety of articles with the various voices--historian, humorist, theorist, practitioner, polemist, poet--that make up the true homo compositionus. We try to show the dappledness of our discipline in each issue.

And our voice certainly is connected to editing policies and the ways in which our scholarly journals shape the discipline. I recognize the necessity of having an organization's journal speak its official voice. But in all our diversity, what is our official voice? The tendency has been to put under the editor's control much of the writer's proper business--form, diction, idiom, syntax. Though the intention is worthy--all editors want to spare the author or journal embarrassment over errors, slips of the pen or mind to which every writer is liable--the results I find troublesome. I'm afraid we'll lose in our composition journals the language of the humanities. Individual style

too often is compromised. Some editors challenge and change in others' written work whatever deviates from their own norm. Such vigilance destroys rhetoric and nuance and threatens the authenticity of the text and flattens out--standardizes--style in a discipline. And why should this be going on in journals of writing?

Although RR was one of the first journals to adopt the New MLA Style, I ask myself more and more if I changed over in haste, even though we've worked hard to avoid the multiplied parenthetical references that many have objected to in the new style, in one colleague's words "a sellout to scientism." We do seem to be tugged in two directions. What image should we adopt: "the tweeds, pipe, and Wallabees of . . . [the] humanist, or the three piece suit, lab coat, and wing-tips of . . . [the] social scientist" (Stephen North, letter to the editor, RR 4 [1985]: 97). Literature surveys in scientific articles are meant to be subordinate to the cited works, while the humanities are a continuing argument about meanings, not a series of reports. I agree with some objections and am considering either a return to the old style or some combination of both. (One irony is that when the new style came out, CCC, then regularly featuring protocol studies and quantitative analyses, was the only composition journal to stand firm against the new style.)

Because RR sees rhetoric as the center of composition studies and believes rhetoric should stay clearly in the

camp of the humanities, we want our citation system to reflect the fact that the writer's style and the reader's processes are more important than efficient communication of raw data. In journals of writing, preserving this emphasis seems to be crucial. (But even if I find myself changing my mind about MLA New Style, I'll never go to the extreme of the editor who recently said he preferred manuscripts that were as much footnotes as text and eagerly turned to the notes before the article itself.) I realize the advantages of having a unified style for citations, yet it's interesting that the British seem not to be bothered at all by various styles in their journals.

Our journals shape our discipline in more concrete ways than personal editing preferences. An official journal like CCC can, and indeed does, influence the direction of our research. In its last six years, CCC emphasized quantitative analyses and protocol studies in large part to further professionalize Composition Studies and to present to others and ourselves that we do have a discipline with its own body of knowledge and that our writing programs and practices should be theory based. I believe the journal made progress toward realizing this goal, but I think we lost something too in that our largest specialized journal selected the acceptable research in rhetoric and composition from a rather narrow area.

And that's why I began Rhetoric Review, not to reshape the field but to remind us of rhetoric's inclusiveness, that

it is both a substantive art and a methodology. The role of Rhetoric Review in Composition Studies is to make sure the center holds, not primarily to shape the field or to direct research. RR's role is to reflect the true diversity in rhetoric and composition studies. I hope the journal captures the various voices of our "dappled" discipline more than shapes a collective, "official" voice. It defines less than the NCTE journals what work is acceptable. It does not, then, I believe, wield as much authority as College English or College Composition and Communication. But we do try to keep the NCTE editors on their toes. Thus RR's position, I believe, is somewhere between NCTE's most generalist jorunal, CE, and CCC.

Areas of research usually have a period of five or six years of "being in." Some of the continuing directions of research that are still "in" are reading and writing connections, one direction here is an attempt to draw in deconstruction theory. Another area with a renewed surge of interest is audience awareness. One area that seems to be on its way "out" is research in the "process" of writing. But as we move beyond emphasis on the cognitive, we'll need to keep in mind that much of our best research must still be based on composing processes. It's not as if we're completely swinging the pendulum back to product over process; we're learning how to build our discipline, our body of knowledge, in a reasoned and scholarly way as we collaborate with and build from others' work.

If I were asked about needed research, what would I, as editor of RR, emphasize? First we need more historical studies. This is one area that I don't foresee as having the usual five or six years of "being in." Our history should form the basis for our work. I cannot see the need for this kind of research ever being exhausted.

Second, we need to become more involved in empirical research as well as historical studies. Despite the direction our journals have taken in the last few years, empirical research has dropped off rather than increased as many thought it would. We can engage in meaningful research without changing our humanistic garb for white lab coats. Empirical research means working from experience and observation rather than science or theory. And articles written for publication can be based on this kind of research; they don't have to be research reports. Thus we can place historical studies as well as our own classroom experience within such a framework as we work from a theoretical base. We must never lose sight of the reality that our discipline is derived from its foundation in practice. We can gather, test, validate, and accumulate a body of knowledge--but it's still, for us, all connected with what we do in a writing classroom.

A third current direction of research which follows from the second is the general subject of literacy. The most recent, exciting, and useful research in this area centers on language as social construction, not language in

a social context. Such studies are beginning to deal with the increasing pluralism in our culture that makes connections with the reality that composition is rooted in cultural and social history beyond the cognitive. Two recent articles explore this area, one by Ken Bruffee in a recent issue of College English and the other by John Trimbur in the spring 1987 Rhetoric Review.

To pull all this together, then, I ask, " Why be an editor?" Because a journal is a we, and one can get rather tired of I. It's a symposium--a gathering. In the unanticipated community of each issue, writers meet one another and their readers. And if a rhetoric and composition journal can't do this well, then what in the world is a journal of writing anyway? I use this question as my touchstone, then ask: Would I subscribe to this journal if it were published by someone else? So far, I've been able to answer yes whenever I see an issue fresh from the bindery, a collection of various voices creating an ongoing dialogue, in the most Burkean sense.